

Ironbound Community Corporation

Serving Our Community Since 1969

October 30, 1995

Mr. Paul A. Tumminello, P.E.
Army Corps of Engineers
New York District
Passaic River Division
80 River Street
Hoboken, New Jersey 07030

**Re: Draft Design Memorandum, Joseph G. Minnish Passaic River Waterfront Park and
Historic Area, Newark, New Jersey**

Dear Mr. Tumminello:

Please accept these comments on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Draft Design Memorandum for the Joseph G. Minnish Passaic River Waterfront Park and Historic Area planned for Newark, New Jersey. These comments are filed on behalf of the Ironbound Community Corporation as well as many residents and neighborhood organizations who have discussed the project with us.

In addition to these comments, the Ironbound Community Corporation endorses and is a signatory to the comments compiled by William Sullivan of the Rutgers Environmental Law Clinic.

For your information, since 1969 the Ironbound Community Corporation, guided by the principle of justice and equality for all, has been working with and for the people of the Ironbound with the expressed purpose of improving the quality of life for individuals, families, and the general community. Our first program, the Ironbound Children's Center, was created in response to the growing child care needs of community parents. Today, we are the largest service provider in Ironbound and offer a wide array of services such as: children's programs, including pre-school child care for 130 children; senior citizen services, including 30,000 meals-on-wheels each year; multi-lingual adult education, including college courses and ESL classes; information, referrals, advocacy, and social services, including an emergency food pantry; a trilingual community newspaper and public access cable TV program; and community organizing projects. The longevity and quality of our services have established us as an integral part of and a stabilizing agent in the Ironbound.

One element of our work has been our membership, along with the Army Corps, on the City of Newark's Passaic Riverfront Working Group since 1993. Our interest from the

Senior Citizens Project : Meals-on-Wheels, Home Friend Program, Senior Ride, Golden Age Clubs • Community Information Center
Ironbound Committee Against Toxic Waste • Neighborhood Crime Committee • "Ironbound Voices" Newspaper •
"Ironbound Insights" Television Show • Peace Education Project

95 Fleming Avenue, Newark, NJ 07105 (201) 344-7208 Fax (201) 589-4668

Children's Center: Preschool, Kindergarten & Family Day Care
317 Elm Street, Newark, NJ 07105 (201) 589-5873 Fax (201) 589-2479

Adult Education Project • Summer Arts Program • After School Program
432 Lafayette Street, Newark, NJ 07105 (201) 465-0947

beginning was to promote an inclusionary public planning process and a master plan that would ensure coordinated and public-interest minded development. Our vision was of a waterfront that would be open and accessible, complimentary to its adjoining neighborhoods and businesses, creating new quality public space and recreational activities, and become an attraction to all the people of Newark. In short, it would be a well thought out piece of Newark's Renaissance that would not only wed itself to city neighborhoods, but also bring people from all over the city together.

In early discussions, we joined with others, such as the Greater Newark Conservancy and the New Jersey Conservation Foundation, in successfully promoting an expansion of the project area beyond the Jackson Street Bridge to Brill Street. This made the project more than a "downtown" one; it connected it with neighborhoods, including two low income housing complexes in Ironbound, and provided it with the opportunity to create much more public space to attract people to the water's edge.

To guide us in our work, in 1994 we developed a set of principles that we believed should guide the planning and development process. They are attached for the official record. In summary, the principles promote and would ensure:

- * Full Development of the entire Project, particularly park & recreational space in the Ironbound section
- * Community Participation in the Planning Process
- * Adequate Public Accommodations & Full, Free Public Access to the Riverfront
- * Quality Open, Public Space & Recreational Facilities
- * Public Safety & Park Maintenance
- * Economic Development & Job Opportunities for Newark Residents & Businesses
- * Economic Development which Complements Ferry St. Businesses
- * Building Construction which Complements the City Landscape in Scale & Character
- * Use of Recycled Materials for Riverfront Furniture

To make sure that our principles represented a community consensus approach, we brought them to community organizations and meetings for discussion. Time and again, residents voiced their approval of the principles and support for ICC's work. The Terrell Homes Tenants' Association and Aspen River-Park Tenants' Association, representing hundreds of residents in housing complexes adjacent to the project area, officially endorsed the principles and work of ICC.

In addition, in an effort to foster the public process and community participation, we have hosted community meetings at which the Corps has been invited to present its ongoing work. The Corps has accepted each invitation; furthermore, it has been very responsive to community suggestions. In March, for example, we summarized in a letter (see attached) to the Corps the concerns and suggestions that were raised at a February community meeting.

In return, the Corps modified its plans to address nearly all the concerns raised, including the installation of new traffic lights on Raymond Boulevard to improve public access, lowering the density of trees for public safety considerations and better view sights from the Boulevard, and inserting an arts amphitheater in the design.

In our view, this has been representative of the Corps' work in this project. The Corps has been accessible and responsive, and has worked in the spirit of this being a community project. We appreciate this, as well as the Corps' stated commitment to continue to work with everyone, including community and environmental organizations, throughout the course of the project. This commitment was reinforced by the exchange of information and ideas at a meeting on October 19, 1995 at the Ironbound Community Center attended by community groups, environmental organizations, the Army Corps and its architectural, engineering, and government agency colleagues. The meeting helped everyone understand the project better and resolved some concerns. (See the attached memorandum for the questions which were addressed.) While questions and concerns still remain, we were pleased that once again the Corps committed to incorporate suggestions on design specifics as the project proceeds.

Despite open questions as well as the lack of a Master Plan by the City, we support the process the Corps has engaged in and the general plan it has presented in the Draft Design Memorandum. While it may not yet be perfect, it represents a major step in the overall process and is essentially compatible with our vision of a Master Plan.

In the spirit of our common goal of a first class waterfront for the people of Newark and the healthy working relationships that have been developed thus far, we offer the following comments for the Corps' further consideration.

1) General Comments on Public Amenities, Environmental Soundness, & Aesthetic Qualities

Generally, we support suggestions and designs that would enhance public amenities and the environmental soundness and aesthetic qualities of the project. For example, when possible, increase the opportunity for public access; opt for more public space, both green and recreational; and lower the bulk heads to bring people closer to the water.

2) Park, Landscaping and Playground Design

As major public amenities, the park, its landscaping and its playgrounds demand and deserve the utmost attention to detail and quality. We urge the Corps to utilize architects who can provide this and also look forward to working with the Corps (and City) on the specifics of the design.

3) Environmentally Related Construction & Design Issues

We were pleased by the attention to detail exemplified by the Corps and its colleagues at the October 19 meeting in regard to environmentally-sensitive issues such as bulk head construction and wetlands creation. The Corps' proposed plans and implementations may be the best available ones at this time. Nevertheless, with the caveat that we do not want to Mr.

delay the project unless it is necessary to protect human health and the environment, we urge the Corps to continue to explore all options and listen to all alternatives before finally committing to and implementing a specific design.

4) "Living Machine"

At the October 19 meeting, the installation of a "living machine" as a natural purification system was discussed. We urge the Corps to evaluate its feasibility for this project. If feasible, the "living machine" could serve not only as an environmental tool, but also as an educational one and further attract people to the park and water's edge.

5) Public Issues at the Performing Arts Center

Without fully reiterating them, we would like to emphasize the concerns expressed in point #1 of the Rutgers Environmental Law Clinic's comments. The issues of public and pedestrian access, view corridors, public space and the spirit of in strategic private tracts, and the height, scale, and character of privately developed buildings are vital ones that must be addressed in a public-minded manner. In this regard, we are once again guided by the principles previously referred to and attached.

6) Master Plan and Overall Coordination

While we find the overall design plan of the Corps to be compatible with our vision of a Master Plan, and recognize that a Master Plan is the responsibility of the City and not of the Corps, we find it difficult to imagine a final design plan by the Corps in the absence of a Master Plan. A Master Plan will decide upon key elements of waterfront development, including public access and rights of way through private tracts, preservation of view corridors, restrictions on building height and density, building design standards, and environmental protection and controls. Furthermore, in order to ensure consistency, aesthetics and the greatest public benefits, the riverfront must be coordinated with related area plans including those for Penn Station and McCarter Highway. This is not only beneficial for the public interest, but also for the private sector so that business and development plans can be made accordingly.

SUMMARY

We have enjoyed working with the Army Corps of Engineers on this project and will continue to support the Corps in its efforts. The prospect of a revitalized and public-oriented waterfront in the Ironbound section of the project area is especially exciting to our community. It is an ideal that we very much wish to be realized and will continue to do all in our power to ensure its realization. We urge the Corps to once again give careful consideration to our comments and those of our colleagues at the Rutgers Environmental Law Clinic, just as you always have heretofore.

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We also appreciate the Corps' commitment to continue working with us on this project. We look forward to this as we aspire together to develop a first class riverfront for the people of Newark.

Sincerely,

Joseph Della Fave
Execituve Director